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On the Eve of the President's Departure

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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May 13, 1960

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

ON THE EVE OF THE PRESIDENT'S DEPARTURE

Mr. President:

The events of the past week should bring home to all--to the Russians, to Americans and to peoples everywhere--a realization of how slender is the reed by which we cling to a civilized survival. That is the fact and it ought now to be visible to all. Yet this fact, this blazing fact, is in danger of being lost. National passions rise up on all sides to overwhelm it. The struggle of propaganda takes precedence over it. The incident is appraised not in terms of its deep implications for the present state of the world's tensions but in terms of whose equipment is better and the present level of skills on each side for penetration, defense and counter-penetration, and even photography.

Let me say with all the seriousness that I possess, that if this game goes on in its present vein--this game of propaganda-counter-propaganda, this game of probe and counter-probe--there will indeed be a wreckage to study, a monumental wreckage. But it will be for some other generation, not this one, to study it. For the wreckage will be not just a plane. It will be the charred remnants of the civilization which houses living mankind.

That is the grim and fundamental reality which confronts the chiefs-of-state on the eve of the summit conference. If their attention remains fixed upon it, there will be no room at that meeting for displays of outraged indignation on anyone's part. There will be no room for propaganda-plays designed to bring to any nation the label of sole custodian of peace or the sole source of provocation to war.

At this critical juncture the four men who will meet are in every sense the principal guardians of humanity's highest hopes, perhaps, of the human species itself. This may well be the decisive moment when the deadly game begins to end in the beginnings of a beginning of a durable peace, or drifts into the path of inevitable war. If they maintain that perspective these men will put aside, they will urge their peoples to put aside, the dangerous provocations and the glib propaganda. They will see these provocations, this propaganda, for what they are, fragments embedded in the great wound which festers in mankind and threatens the very existence of civilization.

It is with that perspective that I hope Mr. Khrushchev will go to Paris. It is with that perspective that I ^{feel sure} ~~hope~~ Mr. Eisenhower will go to Paris.

Mr. Eisenhower will speak at the summit on behalf of all of us-- Democrats and Republicans alike. That is the way under our Constitutional system; there is no other. Anger, consternation or even revulsion at the events of the past week do not alter that fact. As the President carries our common hopes for progress towards a more durable peace so, too, should he command our common support.

There will be a time to explore the grave questions which the events of the past week have raised in this nation. Enough has already been said to make it clear that these questions must be examined thoroughly, relentlessly. But the need now is to provide the fullest support for the President so that he may proceed with this meeting in a fashion which advances the hopes of the people of this nation for peace.

May God go with him.